

once wrote, “Keep thy shop, and thy shop will keep thee.” Today you join America’s diplomatic shop. Our job is to support you as you support and sustain America’s interests and ideals around the world.

So once again, congratulations to you all. God bless you, and God bless our country.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:25 p.m. in the Benjamin Franklin Room of the Harry S. Truman Building. In his remarks, he referred to Ruth A. Davis, Director, Foreign Service Institute; and his mother, former First Lady Barbara Bush.

## Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Republican Congressional Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters February 15, 2001

*The President.* It’s my honor to welcome Members of the United States Senate and Members of the United States House up here in the Cabinet Room to discuss the budget.

I’ll be submitting a budget to the Congress in short order, and I wanted to brief the members of the budget-writing committees about our priorities, our intentions, and of course, get the feedback. I get to propose a budget, and these folks get to write the budget. And we look forward to having a good discussion on it.

Inherent in the budget, of course, is our desire to make sure we protect Social Security—I think there is unanimity around the table for that—that we set clear priorities, that we fund the priorities. In our budget, we’re going to prove to the American people that we can pay down debt, fund priorities, protect Social Security, and there will be money left over, which we strongly believe ought to be passed back to the taxpayers.

I look forward to the discussion with the chairman, near-chairman, and thank you all for coming.

I’ll be glad to answer a few questions. Yes, Jim.

### *Federal Budget*

Q. Mr. President, will you be telling the Members of Congress that you hope to

hold spending to below 4 percent, the increase in spending?

*The President.* We’re not going to give a specific number today, but we are going to argue, make the case that we can slow the rate of spending down; that our spending will be based upon priorities, the priorities I campaigned on; that we will meet the objectives that I talked about in the campaign, which is protecting Social Security, funding public education, strengthening the military, paying down debt—and we’ll be paying down debt; but that we believe the right number for the tax relief package is \$1.6 trillion.

### *Tax Relief Legislation*

Q. Mr. President, if the Senate were to vote today on your tax package, the vote would probably be 51–49 against you, given that there are two Republicans who have said they’re not in favor of it as is. What can you say to Democrats to try to bring more of them on board in the Senate?

*The President.* I can say, wait until you see our budget. You’ll see that it’s well thought out, that we meet important priorities. And I—we’ve got a lot of work to do; I understand that. But this is a democracy; people have different opinions about the subjects.

The people I want to talk to, though—first, before there is any vote—is the American people. And I will; I’ll take my case

to the American people about why I think tax relief makes sense. I'll remind Members of both the Senate and the House that there is a lot of debt at the Federal level, but there is a lot of debt at the private level. We've got a lot of people struggling to pay off credit card consumer debt. I'll tell people that if you're a family of four making \$50,000, you get an additional \$2,000, so you can decide what to do with your money.

So I've got a lot of work to do, but I'm convinced that when the American people hear our plan, they will support it. I think we've got a very good chance of getting the tax package through.

*Representative Cynthia McKinney*

Q. Mr. President, Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney, who serves on the Armed Services Committee in the House, feels that she was snubbed because she didn't go with you during your defense tour this week. What do you say to her and some of the other members of the Congressional Black Caucus, especially after you met with them saying that you're into an inclusive era?

*The President.* We had a very good meeting here and discussed a wide range of issues. I'm glad their Members came up, sat right here at this table, and expressed their opinion. My administration certainly never attempts to leave anybody out. And

to the extent that Members—any Member feels left out, I'm sorry that that's the case. But we took the Members on that trip, and there will be other trips.

*U.S.S. Greeneville Collision With Ehime Maru*

Q. Mr. President, were you surprised to learn that there were civilians at the helm of the submarine that sank the Japanese fishing boat?

*The President.* Well, I think what is going to be necessary is for Secretary Rumsfeld and the Defense Department to review all policy regarding civilian activity during military exercises. I look forward to the Defense Department review of the policies, their current policies, particularly in light of the recent tragedy that took place in Hawaii.

I want to reiterate what I said to the Prime Minister of Japan. I'm deeply sorry about the accident that took place. Our Nation is sorry that the accident happened, and we will do everything we can to help recover the bodies.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:50 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori of Japan. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.